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July 7, 2015

Dear IQC Members:

I continue to read with great interest of the possible changes and inclusions in the California state school curriculum. As a historian studying the early migration of the Punjabi Sikh Diaspora, I would like to share my feedback regarding the following paragraph based on my six years of research in this area.

With respect to the following:

Grade-8, Page 241, lines 2375-77:

“The Gold Rush in California and agricultural labor in Hawaii spurred Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, and Sikh South Asian (Hindu and Sikh) immigration to the United States. Eventually the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Immigration Act of 1917 greatly limited Asian entry to the United States. California built the immigration station at Angel Island to facilitate the process of Asian admissions.” Need discussion.

It is a well-documented fact that overwhelmingly Indian Diaspora migrants or migrants from British India to North America were from Punjab and were Sikhs. Though a distinct minority, there is also no question that these migrants included Muslims and Hindus who migrated to Western Canada and the U.S. Further, it is also a well-accepted fact that in a time of racial, ethnic and religious persecution by members of the dominant culture in North America, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims made community together in a myriad of ways. One of the areas I, along with many others, have particular knowledge of is the Ghadar Party. This important political organization influenced much in the diasporic community for years and was composed of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. However, by simple numbers the backbone of the organization was Punjabi Sikh migrants. But there is nothing simple about Ghadar and their desire for social justice and emancipation from British colonial rule. To paraphrase novelist Paule Marshall, altogether they were in the chosen place and became a timeless people.

Like other literatures, historical works are constantly being updated and rethought. With respect to the Ghadar Party much, but not all, of previous writings have put the foundation of the Ghadar Party in California. The Smithsonian, at my initiation, recently changed its “Beyond Bollywood” exhibit to indicate this new understanding. Current history now increasingly reflects that Ghadar was organized and founded in Astoria, Oregon in 1913, largely initiated and attended by the Sikh millworkers and organic intellectuals of the Columbia River, and aided by Hindu and Muslim intellectuals. There was also a smaller community of Muslim laborers throughout the Pacific Northwest, including in the Astoria area, and a number of its members took part in Ghadar. After the party’s founding in Astoria, Oregon the

Ghadar Party headquarters and press were moved to San Francisco where, again, participation came from all walks of life and religious backgrounds in the Indian Diaspora. Measured by simple numbers, Hindu spokespeople were disproportionately represented in the San Francisco headquarters as compared to the backbone of the party – its primary recruits and source of funds – who were Punjabi Sikhs. What is most important, however, is that all were welcome in the cause of ending British colonialism in, and the democratization of, their shared natal home.

San Francisco was likely chosen as the location for Ghadar's headquarters because of the city's radical currents and sympathies. For similar reasons, Astoria likely was the early organizing center for Ghadar because of its radical traditions rooted amongst its international laborers. Astoria was the home of many socialist and anarchist workers from around the globe who rejected or moderated the racial and ethnic targeting of Indian Diaspora and others at a time when it was rife throughout the West. Thus, both regions are important in understanding the places and forces that ran counter to the endemic racism and prejudice of the era and how Indian Diaspora of all persuasions creatively utilized such centers for their own empowerment.

I have dedicated the last few years towards researching the Ghadar Party for an upcoming book for the University of Washington Press, which has taken me to discover Punjabi language resources in India, and archival and community-based research in both Canada and the United States; all of this research has cumulatively confirmed the above noted historical facts. If you have any questions or require document support for the historical facts noted above, please do not hesitate to contact me. I wish you the best in your important efforts towards transforming your state's curriculum to more accurately reflect its diverse roots.

With warm regards,

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